

## Following the Holy Ghost

Cooper Mt Ward

April 14, 2024

### Introduction

- Russell M Nelson (2018)  
“In coming days, it will not be possible to survive spiritually without the guiding, directing, comforting, and constant influence of the Holy Ghost.”  
(Revelation for the Church, Revelation for Our Lives, Conference April 2018)
  
- Look closer at what this means:
- Another way to parse the statement, in a less precise way – it will be not possible to survive spiritually without the
  - Guiding influence of the Holy Ghost
  - Directing influence of the Holy Ghost
  - Comforting influence of the Holy Ghost
  - Constant influence of the Holy Ghost
  
- Today, I want to focus on a couple things about having the constant influence of the Holy Ghost
  - Learning to hear the Spirit.
  - Immersing ourselves in the Spirit that we may hear and follow the guidance and direction.

## Constant Influence – Learning to “hear” the Spirit

### ***Following Rod Barnes’ Singing***

- I generally can’t hit a note from sheet music
- However, I *can* hit a note if I hear it
- But, I have trouble hitting a specific note when there is more than one played at the same time
- Many moons ago I was called as bishop of this ward
- Rod Barnes as counselor sitting next to me
- Rod’s beautiful voice, correct notes in a beautiful way
  - Sister Jones, Sister Chandler
- I chose to listen and follow Rod when singing as he sat next to me
- I decided to sing in the choir as a break in my day long Sunday
- Because I had learned that if I followed Rod’s voice I could sing correctly I would make sure I was next to him in practice and when we sang
- Between choir and sitting next to him every Sunday I had deliberate, intentional effort to learn to hear and follow Rod for nearly 6.5 years
- I became quite good at following Rod, tune others out
- After we were released, I noticed something else.
- I could hear his voice and follow him when I wasn’t next to him in a congregation of voices without intentional effort.
  
- We can liken my learning to hear and follow Rods voice to learning to hear and follow the voice of the Spirit
  - I recognized his was an excellent voice, sang correct notes in a beautiful way
  - I decided if I followed Rod’s voice, I could sing better than otherwise ever would by myself.
  - I become familiar with Rod’s voice.
  - I had intentional practice at following his voice.
  - As a result, if I was listening, I could hear his voice even with lots of other voices around me.
  - I chose to follow Rod’s voice.

### ***Holy Ghost Witnesses to our Spirit***

- Learning to listen and follow the Spirit we must first remember there are two parts to our nature – physical and spiritual.
- Physical
  - We can learn things through many ways - through experiences, our senses and by reason.
- Boyd K Packer

“If you learn by reason only you will never understand the Spirit and how it works, regardless of how much you learn about other things.” “Your Spirit learns in a different way than does your intellect.” (Oct 94 conference. Ensign, Nov 94, pg 59)
- Through the process of **The Spirit speaking to our spirit** there is never any deception or uncertainty. “by the power of the Holy Ghost [we] may know the truth of all things” (Moroni 10:5).
- Satan’s MO then, is to disrupt the lines of spiritual communication by disobedience and sin or to have us ignore or disbelieve spiritual communication, relying solely upon the flesh
- How critical is it then that we learn to be able to discern and hear the voice of the spirit so that we may follow!

## ***Receiving Revelation***

- There are many ways to receive revelation
  - Some are easy to recognize – Voice of the prophet, or angels
  - Probably the most important and the one we need to learn to hear much like I learned to hear Rod's voice is the still small voice
- More often we hear the still small voice rather than the thunder of voice or receive visitations of angels.
- This principle is true for everyone, even with revelation that comes to prophets:
  - President Kimball once said: "The great volume of revelation ... come[s] to today's prophets in the less spectacular way—that of deep impressions, but without spectacle or glamour or dramatic events accompanying." (Instructor, Aug. 1960, pg 257)
  - President Spencer W Kimball  
"Some have no ear for spiritual messages...when they come in common dress...Expecting the spectacular, one may not be fully alerted to the *constant* flow of revealed communication "(Teachings of Spencer W Kimball, p. 457)
- My personal observation:
  - I have noticed that revelation is there if I but look
  - The still small voice is "common dress" method of revelation President Kimball refers to.

## ***Still Small Voice – Feeling the Spirit***

- While we may hear words or sentences more often however, The Holy Ghost speaks with a voice that we feel more than we hear.
- Boyd K Packer  
"We do not have the words (even the scriptures do not have words) which perfectly describe the Spirit. The scriptures usually use the word voice, which does not exactly fit. These delicate, refined spiritual communications are not seen with our eyes nor heard with our ears.... It is a voice that one *feels* more than one hears." (Watchman on the tower, Pg 279)
- Notice the words Nephi uses in speaking to his older brothers:  
Ye have seen an angel, and he spake unto you; yea, ye have heard his voice from time to time; and he hath spoken unto you in a still small voice, but ye were past *feeling*, that ye could not *feel* his words; (1 Nephi 17:45)
- Question then is - How do we know we feel the Holy Ghost?
- You may have wondered – Is this revelation? Is this the Spirit? Is it just me?
  - I could spend a lot of time on this but will only focus on 2 things:
- **President Harold B. Lee:**  
"When we understand more than we know with our minds, when we understand with our hearts, then we know that the Spirit of the Lord is working upon us. " (Harold B. Lee, Stand Ye in Holy Places, pg 92]
- Elder David A. Bednar :  
"I think we overcomplicate this. I think we overanalyze it. Moroni teaches that all good emanates from Christ. So if you have a thought to do something good, it's prompted by the Holy Ghost. ... If it invites and entices to do good, it comes from Christ and we ought to do it."  
[see [Moroni 7:13, 16](#)]."
- Moroni 7:12,13, 15  
12) Wherefore, all things which are good cometh of God; and that which is evil cometh of the devil; for the devil is an enemy unto God, and fighteth against him continually, and inviteth and enticeth to sin, and to do that which is evil continually.  
13) But behold, that which is of God inviteth and enticeth to do good continually; wherefore, every thing which inviteth and enticeth to do good, and to love God, and to serve him, is inspired of God.

### ***How does these "enticing's" of the Spirit feel that are from God?***

- Words to describe "right"
  - Centered
  - Settled (President Dalton)
  - Peace, calm
  - Harmony
  - Resonates with my spirit
- That which "entices to do good", that gives us a harmony and peace, is in accordance to principles of righteousness, that prompting we should respond to

### ***How does the Spirit not feel?***

- Words to describe "wrong"
  - stirred up (what was Satan always doing to the Lamanites)
  - unsettled
  - anger, (There is only one person that ever gets angry in the temple)
  - strife
  - Off key
  - Dissonance with my spirit
- If we receive a prompting to do something that makes us feel uneasy, something we know in our mind to be wrong and contrary to the principles of righteousness we should not respond to it.
- In this like many things we learn by experience, sometimes by trial and error
  - We need to learn from both our mistakes and our correct choices
- Boyd K Packer  
"As an Apostle I listen now to the same inspiration, coming from the same source, in the same way, I listened to as a boy. The signal is much clearer now." (Oct 94 conference. Ensign, Nov 94, pg 59)
- What changed? It was President Packer that changed not the signal. We too must learn and change.

### ***Sometimes things don't turn out like we expect***

- What about when I feel that I've followed the Spirit and things do not turn out the way I thought?
- Sometimes we begin to doubt ourselves
- Oliver Cowdery:
- D&C 6:22 – 23
  - "... Did I not speak peace to your mind concerning the matter?.."
- In other words "if it was right then, it is still right then"
- Often we simply don't know the full implications or why things happen the way they do
  - Sometimes in hindsight we understand

## **Constant Influence of the Holy Ghost – With us always**

- “Constant influence of the Holy Ghost” with us always.
- How can the influence of the Holy Ghost be constant?
- Or in other words how can we have the Holy ghost with us always?
- D&C 20:77  
    **“...that they may always have his Spirit to be with them... ”**
- What does "His Spirit" mean in that promise?
- The simple answer is the same as was received at baptism – the Gift of the Holy Ghost
- After baptism we were given the gift of the Holy Ghost by the laying on of hands
- This gift is the right to constant companionship of the Holy Ghost if we are worthy
- The statement "Receive the Holy Ghost" is a directive to strive for the baptism of the spirit
- Elder David A Bednar  
    "We were baptized by immersion in water for the remission of sins. We must also be baptized by and *immersed* in the Spirit of the Lord, “and then cometh a remission of your sins by fire and by the Holy Ghost” (2 Ne. 31:17)" ("That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with US", April 2006 General Conference)
- I really like the concept of immersed in the Spirit



## Immersed in the Spirit, Offending the Spirit

- The *intensity* with which we feel the Spirit is not always the same and is not necessarily an indication of how spiritual we are.
  - In other words, our spirituality is not judged by how intense we feel the Spirit
  - Dramatic or strong impressions do not come frequently
  - The scriptures describe the influence of the Holy Ghost as "a still small voice"
  - We usually receive communications from the Holy Ghost as feelings and in a way that is quiet, delicate and subtle.
- My testimony – Examine it:
  - It is primarily built upon witnesses of the still small voice
  - Punctuated with deep spiritual experiences
- Besides striving to recognize the communications of the Spirit and move toward the Spirit we should also strive to recognize when we, as King Benjamin put it in
  - Mosiah 2:36 "withdraw [our]selves from the Spirit of the Lord, that it may have no place in [us]"
- In other words, we need to pay attention and learn what separates us from the Holy Spirit
- Elder David A Bednar  
"The standard is clear. If something we think, see, hear, or do distances us from the Holy Ghost, then we should stop thinking, seeing, hearing, or doing that thing. If that which is intended to entertain, for example, alienates us from the Holy Spirit, then certainly that type of entertainment is not for us. Because the Spirit cannot abide that which is vulgar, crude, or immodest, then clearly such things are not for us. Because we estrange the Spirit of the Lord when we engage in activities we know we should shun, then such things definitely are not for us." ("That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with US", April 2006 General Conference)
- This all may seem daunting
- We think "Nobody can live so that the presence of the Holy Ghost is with us every second, of every minute, of every hour of every day
- This may be true but listen to Elder Bednar:
- Elder David A Bednar  
"The Holy Ghost can tarry with us much, if not most, of the time—and certainly the Spirit can be with us more than it is not with us. As we become ever more immersed in the Spirit of the Lord, we should strive to recognize

impressions when they come and the influences or events that cause us to withdraw ourselves from the Holy Ghost." ("That We May Always Have His Spirit to Be with US", April 2006 General Conference)

## **Renew our qualification for the Spirit to be with us**

- We sometimes we hear and think of sacrament as renewal of our baptismal covenant.
- What does that mean?
  - We are not being baptized again...
  - When we take of the sacrament, we make covenants
  - So, what is the meaning then?
- Dallin H Oaks in a conference talk said this:  
"as we partake of the sacrament, we renew our *qualification* for the promise "that [we] may always have his Spirit to be with [us]" ("Always Have His Spirit ", October 1996 General Conference)
- Since hearing and pondering that statement my understanding and focus has become this:
- As I partake of the sacrament and keep the covenants I make I can become worthy or qualify for the promised blessing of the Spirit to be with me
- As we take on the sacrament worthily we can receive remission of our sins.
- As we are cleansed from our sins we are worthy to have His spirit to be with us
- That is to say as we worthily partake of the sacrament we meet the conditions to "have his Spirit with" us.
- The need to be clean in order to have the companionship and guidance of the Holy Ghost explains why we are commanded to "meet together oft" to partake of the sacrament

## **Spirituality is not Stagnate**

- Elder Neil Andersen  
"Spirituality is not stagnate". (General Conference Leadership Training, April 2015)
- Spirituality, the "baptism of the Spirit", that is to say how immersed we are to the Spirit is not a stagnate thing
  - I like the description of spirituality as our degree of immersion in the Spirit
  - It seems that we are always moving either toward greater immersion or spirituality or perhaps away from it.
  - It is not usually a black and white thing.
  - It seems to be a matter of degree and what is important is what direction am I headed – toward greater or lesser immersion in the Spirit.
- Baptism of the Spirit, or sanctification, or purification, should not be a one-time event after baptism.
  - It should be an ongoing process
- This is what Elder Renlund taught us in his talk this last conference about spiritual momentum
  - That we intentionally and iteratively follow the doctrine of Christ
  - As we do this we become more like Christ and more immersed in the Spirit
- Again this points to the importance of the sacrament as part of the process wherein Christ's atonement is applied and we are cleansed and purified by the Spirit-

## **Closing**

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## **Testimony**